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SUBJECT: ANNOUNCEMENT OF CENSUS RESULTS TO BE DELAYED AT LEAST UNTIL  
MID-MARCH

REF: KHARTOUM 154

1. (SBU) On 16 February the Fifth Population Census of Sudan Technical Working Group (TWG) met in Khartoum to review the national census priority results and make a decision on whether the results should be forwarded to the National Population Census Council (NPCC). At the meeting, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) Director Yasin Abdeen indicated that the results should be forwarded to the NPCC for its review and endorsement, while Southern Sudan Center for the Census and Statistical Evaluation (SSCCSE) Isaiah Chol strongly disagreed and explained that the data should be properly analyzed and undergo thorough consistency checks by technical experts before being delivered to the NPCC. According to Chol and SSCCSE technical experts, the latter have not had enough time since the merge of North and South data files in Khartoum (which took place in late January and early February) to run critical checks and perform data analysis required to conclude whether the data are reasonable or unreasonable. According to Legal Advisor to the Assessment and Evaluation Commission (AEC) Dr. Iris Breutz, "time [at the TWG] was wasted on discussions that should have taken place between [technical] experts before the meeting."

2. (SBU) According to USAIDoff and Breutz, both of whom attended the TWG, the SSCCSE contests some of the northern data (gathered and data-processed by the CBS) because it shows peculiar trends, such as a relatively small number of Southerners living in northern Sudan and high population figures for Darfur, despite the fact this region was not fully enumerated (reftel). The SSCCSE has also questioned the method the CBS used for enumerating nomads because the North's nomadic population data were surprisingly high. Both donors and the Census Monitoring and Observation Committee (MOC) Chairman urged the CBS and the SSCCSE to reach a unified position and technical solutions for determining whether the data are sound before moving it on to the NPCC for its endorsement. At the end of the day-long TWG, an agreement was reached that the northern and southern census bodies, together with international experts currently present at the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), will meet to decide upon procedures for checking the quality of the merged national data. They will then proceed with running data checks and analysis in order to reach a final data set with which both sets of analysts are satisfied. It was also agreed that the TWG will reconvene to review the results of the further data analysis during the first week of March (although this date may slip if the technical experts deem more time is necessary to run data checks in order to reach the determination baseline).

3. (SBU) USAIDoff told poloff on 17 February that the CBS and the SSCCSE have still not exchanged raw, unedited data files. While the SSCCSE is amenable to making an exchange, the Director of the CBS refuses to do so, arguing that mutual trust of each side's data should be enough. The absence of a north/south raw data file exchange creates a serious lack of transparency in the final merged data figures and provides an additional reason for the SSCCSE to be

skeptical of the North's data. SSCCSE Director Chol told Consul General Datta on 18 February in Juba that the CBS' refusal to provide raw data to the SSCCSE is a blatant attempt by the North to manipulate the final census numbers. Chol also said that if the CBS continues to refuse to hand over unedited data files for the North, it is likely that the SSCCSE will not accept the final census results and will refuse to participate in their release.

14. (SBU) Comment: While final census figures were expected to be released in February, the lack of agreement between the census bodies to submit the data to the NPCC this month means that final census figures will not be released until mid-March, at the earliest. Anomalies in the northern data are of serious concern to the Southern and international experts and without the CBS' consent to hand over its raw, unedited data file to the SSCCSE (and vice versa), there is little chance that anomalies will be adequately resolved. It is also unlikely that the CBS and the SSCCSE will reach a unified position on whether the data are conclusively "reasonable" or "unreasonable" given these anomalies and the lack of transparency of the figures. In the event of a disagreement over the census figures and a likely Government of Southern Sudan rejection of the official results, the USG should encourage the parties to move past this disagreement as quickly as possible and continue to prepare in earnest for the upcoming elections (reftel).

FERNANDEZ